

This listing of claims represents the current claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (currently amended) A method of improving the mechanical strength of a membrane comprising the step of:

~~providing a microporous sheet comprising a blend of an aliphatic polyolefin and a thermoplastic olefin elastomer selected from the group consisting of polyethylene, polypropylene, copolymers thereof, of ethylene-propylene rubbers, ethylene-propylene-diene terpolymer rubbers, and combinations thereof with the elastomer comprising less than 10 percent by blend weight;~~

blending less than 10 percent by blend weight of a thermoplastic olefin elastomer selected from the group consisting of: ethylene-propylene rubbers, ethylene-propylene-diene terpolymer rubbers, and combinations thereof at;

forming a microporous sheet by a dry stretch method;

where said microporous sheet exhibits greater puncture strength than a similar microporous sheet having no said thermoplastic olefin elastomer.

2. (original) The method of Claim 1 wherein the elastomer comprises about 2 to 10 percent by blend weight.

3. (original) The method of Claim 2 wherein the elastomer comprises about 3 to 7 percent by blend weight.

4. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 1 wherein the microporous sheet has a Gurley air permeability less than 35 seconds/10cc.

5. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 4 wherein the microporous sheet has a Gurley air permeability less than 25 seconds/10cc.

6. (cancelled) ~~The method of Claim 1 wherein the polyolefins selected from polyethylene, polypropylene, copolymers thereof, and blends thereof.~~

7. (cancelled) ~~The method of Claim 1 wherein the thermoplastic olefin elastomer is selected from the group of ethylene propylene rubbers, ethylene propylene diene terpolymer rubber, and combinations thereof.~~

8. (cancelled) ~~A method of improving the mechanical strength of a membrane comprising the step of:~~  
~~————— providing a microporous sheet having a Gurley air permeability less than 35 seconds/10cc comprising a blend of an aliphatic polyolefin selected from the group consisting of~~

~~polyethylene, polypropylene, copolymers thereof, and blends thereof, and a thermoplastic olefin elastomer being selected from the group consisting of ethylene propylene rubbers, ethylene propylene diene terpolymer rubbers, and combinations thereof, with the elastomer comprising 3 to 7 percent by blend weight.~~

9. (Previously presented) A diffusion membrane comprising:  
a dry stretched microporous sheet comprising a blend of an aliphatic polyolefin and a thermoplastic olefin elastomer, the elastomer comprising less than 10 percent by blend weight, the polyolefin being selected from the group consisting of polyethylene, polypropylene, copolymers thereof, and blends thereof, the thermoplastic olefin elastomer being selected from the group consisting of ethylene-propylene rubbers, ethylene-propylene-diene terpolymer rubbers, and combinations thereof.

10. (Previously presented) The membrane of Claim 9 wherein the elastomer comprises between 2 and 10 percent by blend weight.

11. (Previously presented) The membrane of Claim 10 wherein the elastomer comprises between 3 and 7 percent by blend weight.

12. (new) A method of improving the mechanical strength of a microporous membrane comprising the step of:

providing an aliphatic polyolefin selected from the group consisting of polyethylene, polypropylene, copolymers thereof, and blends thereof;

blending a thermoplastic olefin elastomer selected from the group of ethylene-propylene rubbers, ethylene-propylene-diene terpolymer rubbers, and combinations thereof at less than 10 percent by blend weight;

forming a microporous sheet by a dry stretch process;

where said microporous sheet exhibits greater tensile strength than a similar microporous sheet having no said thermoplastic olefin elastomer.

13. (new) The method of Claim 12 wherein the elastomer comprises about 2 to 10 percent by blend weight.

14. (new) The method of Claim 13 wherein the elastomer comprises about 3 to 7 percent by blend weight.

15. (new) The method of Claim 12 wherein the microporous sheet has a Gurley air permeability less than 35 seconds/10cc.

16. (new) The method of Claim 12 wherein said microporous sheet exhibits greater puncture strength than a similar microporous sheet having no said thermoplastic olefin elastomer.